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Race, Riots, and the Police, by Howard Rahtz, Boulder CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2016, £24.50 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-626-37558-1

Howard Rahtz joined the Cincinnati Police Department in 1988, after a career in alcohol and drug rehabilitation, and served for nineteen years, retiring with the rank of captain. He has published four books, the first two in-service and the third – *Drugs, Crime and Violence: From Trafficking to Treatment* – in 2012. *Race, Riots, and the Police* is an analysis of one hundred years of race riots in America as a symptom of the ‘fissure between the police and the African American community’ and advances a selection of methods to bridge that fissure (p.1). This is an ambitious aim to achieve with a slim volume and my main criticism of Rahtz’s often compelling writing is the lack of structure that is evident from the very beginning and continues all the way to the end, inhibiting the solutions selected from coalescing into a coherent strategy.

The first chapter is only four pages long and serves as an extended abstract rather than introduction, albeit one which fails to include a clear statement of intent (like that reconstructed above) and appears to make controversial assumptions, for example that ‘police use of force is the tip’ of the spear of racism (p.3). The remaining ten chapters are divided as follows: a historical summary of American race riots from 1919 to 2014 (2 to 4), the contemporary causes of race riots (5 to 6), the contemporary solutions to race riots (7 to 10), and a conclusion involving a series of recommendations based on chapters 5 to 10 (11). The combination of breadth of subject and lack of structure produces a study in which issues of similar importance are discussed in a perplexing variety of depth. While the use of force, the war on drugs, and police legitimacy receive the attention they deserve, the complexities of police patrol (chapter 7), stop and frisk (chapter 10), and social conditions in African

American communities (chapter 11) are accorded only superficial treatment. The final chapter consists of twelve methods to bridge the blue-black fissure, some of which have been discussed previously, but others that are sketched for the first time and the effect is to dilute rather than reinforce the insights emerging from the preceding chapters.

Rahtz's analysis of a century of race riots provides a credible basis for his inquiry as he examines the changing role of the police in civil unrest. A fascinating – and worrying – point he raises but does not develop is the pernicious influence of the press, particularly with respect to the violence in both Los Angeles in 1992 and Ferguson in 2014. The irony is that while the press are, quite rightly, the first to hold the police accountable to the community, the media industry itself has very little accountability in spite of its potential impact across the entire nation and beyond. A related point that Rahtz does develop in satisfying detail is the problem of establishing and maintaining police legitimacy. He uses the apt analogy of a bank account:

All police departments have a certain trust balance in their account. Actions by every officer – from those answering the phone to those responding to a call – will add to or subtract from this account. When major incidents occur, the trust account needs to be at a level that will withstand the event fallout (p.53).

The idea is that if the Los Angeles and Ferguson police departments had a higher balance in their respective accounts in 1992 and 2014, they would have had a greater chance of maintaining the peace in the wake of the incidents that caused the riots. The poor blue-black relations of both departments prior to the disorder lend Rahtz's analogy plausibility from the outset and moving beyond specific examples to riot prevention more generally, the notion of a trust balance lies at the heart of the community policing model of law enforcement. What is especially powerful about Rahtz's conception is that it represents the police department in

terms of an account shared by every single employee: each officer and staff member has the potential to deposit and withdraw trust and everyone in the department benefits from the credit gained and suffers from the debt incurred. This is powerful incentive for police officers to treat the community with respect and courtesy at every possible opportunity.

Rahtz's experience and expertise in police training inform a great deal of his discussion and he cites examples of departments having acquired reputations for best practice in different aspects of policing, for example the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department in the use of force and his own Cincinnati in community problem-oriented policing. Rahtz also references Radley Balko's ground-breaking *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces* (2013), agreeing with Balko about the urgent need for more oversight at the state level. In the course of examining both training and oversight, Rahtz mentions what will perhaps be the most shocking feature of American policing to those unfamiliar with the system: the US has more than 18,000 police departments (p.147). Rahtz does not cite his source, but the most recent Department of Justice (DoJ) reports identify 15,388 local police or sheriff's departments (Reaves 2015) and 73 federal agencies with the powers of arrest and authority to carry firearms (Reaves 2012) for a total of 15,461. The difficulties in maintaining any kind of consistency in everyday practice and in training standards is self-evident and Rahtz draws attention to the significance of the concerns the system raises. To set it in context, if one takes the UK as having roughly 20% of the US's population, one would expect to find a little over 3,000 agencies with the powers of arrest and authority to carry firearms in the UK when there are actually about 50. The problems of consistency, standards, and oversight are exacerbated by what may well be an even more shocking pair of statistics: of the 15,388 local departments, only 5% employ 100 or more officers and 48% *employ 10 or less officers* (Reaves 2015). Given that repressive regimes and poor police-

community relations are often associated with national militarised police forces – for example, the South African Police during apartheid and the *Gendarmerie nationale* in contemporary France – one might think that the smaller the department the greater the transparency and accountability. Rahtz, following the lead of Balko and others, shows that this is not the case because the small police departments in America have considerable scope for the abuse of authority and for corruption courtesy of oversight by local prosecutors, local judges, and local juries. The balance, where community responsive and responsible policing is maximised (and the problems noted above minimised), lies somewhere in between France's national system and the mass of miniature police departments in the US.

Rahtz's exploration of police legitimacy (chapter 8 and elsewhere) is the most original and perceptive part of the study and underpins many of his other insights (such as the unwieldy and inefficient policing system) as well as his most convincing recommendations for repair. The firm foundation upon which these recommendations rest means that there is a useful strategy to be extracted from the volume, albeit it one whose thesis is obscured by the disappointing lack of organisation and focus. Reconstructing the divisions I initially suggested, this is a book of two parts, problem and solution. The problem is: riots are a symptom of the blue-black divide (chapters 2 to 4) and this divide is exacerbated by the failure to solve use of force problems (chapter 5) and the failure to end the war on drugs (chapter 6). The solution to bridging the divide is a three-pronged strategy involving the consolidation of police legitimacy by: closer police and community relations, specifically the use of riot prevention forums (chapters 7 to 9); state oversight on police misconduct, deadly force investigation, deadly force data reporting, and SWAT units (chapter 10); and the decriminalisation of marijuana (chapters 6 and 10). Setting the argument out in this way foregrounds the substantial value of Rahtz's contribution to the debate about police racism.

The DoJ’s respective reports on the Ferguson (2015) and Chicago (2017) police departments offer further evidence for this value, but the new administration seems unlikely to implement any of Rahtz’s proposed reforms. President Trump has recently committed to *reducing* federal oversight of police departments (Balko 2017) and to being “ruthless” in the fight against drugs’ (Ingraham 2017). If Rahtz’s strategy is sound – and I think it is – this does not bode well for blue-black relations over the next four years.

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